

Adversaries organize to fight boycott

Groups differ on 2 but fear cost to state

By **Louis Agullar**
Gazette Telegraph

There is an effort under way by both supporters and critics of Amendment 2 to form groups to oppose the boycott of Colorado, an economic threat fueled by the perception the new law is anti-gay.

Thursday night in Colorado Springs, about 100 people showed up at the first public meeting of a grass-roots organization that vows to boycott the boycotters of Colorado.

On the same day, a coalition of metro Denver-based business, civic and religious leaders announced the formation of a new group that will fight Amendment 2 but not advocate a boycott.

And today in Colorado Springs, the president of a national Latino civil rights group with more than 100,000 members will announce that his organization plans to battle the boycott of this state and its products because it puts too many Hispanics in Colorado at economic risk.

The groups acted independently of one another, and there are no plans by any of them to work in any coordinated effort against the national boycott movement against Colorado. The state has lost millions of dollars in canceled conventions, endured the condemnation of public officials in other states and has been labeled the "hate state" by some since its voters passed Amendment 2 in November.

The amendment bars laws that prohibit gays, lesbians and bisexuals from discrimination based on their sexual orientation.

Thursday night at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Colorado Springs, supporters of the amendment gathered for the first public meeting of the B.A.C.K. O.F.F. Colorado Committee (Boycotters Against Colorado Keep Out of Our Affairs). The group has vowed to target cities and organizations that endorse the Colorado boycott.

"This is not just my voice," said founder Joseph Nee of Colorado Springs. "For two weeks straight, I've had non-stop phone calls from people who want to join. It seems to me that a lot of people agree with what I'm saying."

Referring to Amendment 2 critics, Nee said, "Those groups just go on TV and start saying things like 'bigot' and



said. In any case, he's leaving Fort Carson. On Monday, Dennis will start a six-week course at the Army recruiting school at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Ind.

The mother of 19-year-old Pvt. Daniel C. "Skip" Swiantek, the soldier who died in the accident, was disappointed by the news.

"The Army apparently couldn't pin the blame on anyone, so now it's just over, I guess," said Melissa Swiantek from her Pennsylvania home. The family has consulted attorneys but has not decided whether to sue the military.

"It's not something I want to rush into," Swiantek said.

"Right now, I just want to wait. I feel like I'm at a dead end."

Her son, an Army medic with the Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry, had been in the military only eight months.

Swiantek was driving an M113A Armored Personnel Carrier — which he described as an "armored box on a pair of tracks" in a letter home — during a two-week training exercise at Fort Carson in August. He apparently lost control, flipped the vehicle and was crushed under its weight.

It was later discovered that Swiantek did not have a valid driver's license for that vehicle.

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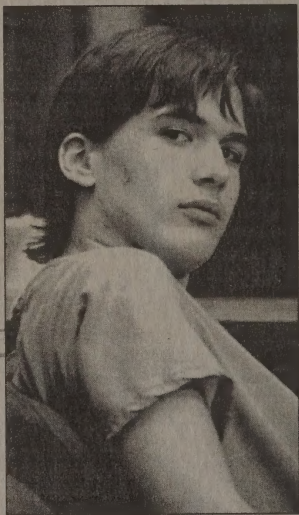
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Photos by Bob Ja



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Amendment 2/Groups differ on measure

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Nee said he wasn't opposed to the court challenge of Amendment 2. "That's the way to do, through the law," he said. "But to just mock our vote and call the state all kind of names, I really disagree with that."

Already, B.A.C.K. O.F.F. has received the support of a Los Angeles minister who said he would begin a California chapter. He's Steven Gooden, a conservative who sang at the Republican National Convention. He is a singer and minister of music at Granada Hills Community Church in the Simi Valley area.

Although poles apart from the Springs group, the newly formed Colorado Alliance to Restore Equality shares one belief: It too will not endorse the boycott. Among its members are two Denver City Council members, the American Civil Liberties Union, convention and tourism officials, members of Denver Mayor Wellington Webb's staff and area businesses — all of whom have fought against the amendment.

The group was formed to "undo Amendment 2 by legal and political action and to undo the harm Amendment 2 has caused to Colorado," according to a prepared release. But one member of the new group, who requested anonymity, said another reason the group was formed was "to get away from the boycott while still fighting the amendment."

The member added: "The boycott our people in Denver in an

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The member added: "The boycott put people in Denver in an odd spot. The gay community had our support, and we don't see why we have to suffer for it now because of this boycott."

Fear of economic suffering also is why the Latin United League of Latin American Citizens has no plans to say no to Colorado. The Hispanic group's president, however, plans in a press conference today to condemn the amendment as discriminatory against gays.

The group has about 300 members statewide and well over 100,000 nationally, said Jorge Amaya of Greeley, a former state president of the group.

"With the boycott, the gays are putting their needs in front of everyone else, especially Latinos," Amaya said.

Amaya said the "the most convenient targets" for boycotts are the service industries, such as hotels, and agricultural products — areas that employ many Hispanics.

Amaya added that there is lingering resentment that gay-community leaders rebuffed requests by some Hispanic leaders for help in lobbying the state Legislature to undo a voter-approved amendment that designates English as the state's official language. Many Latino groups believe the 1988 measure is cruel and unfair to Spanish-speaking Hispanics.

"So, it seems, they are asking us to put a lot of Latinos at risk economically while we don't see them doing a lot for our concerns," Amaya said.

Bruce Loeffler, spokesman for Ground Zero, an anti-Amendment 2 group in Colorado Springs, said his organization still will support the boycott.

"It's always been a complicated issue," he said. "It has kept the pressure on this state, and that is good. As far as B.A.C.K. O.F.F. is concerned, I really think it will backfire and just bring more attention to the

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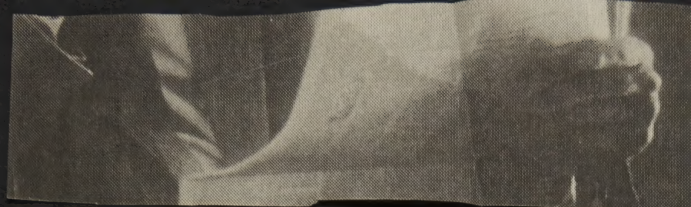
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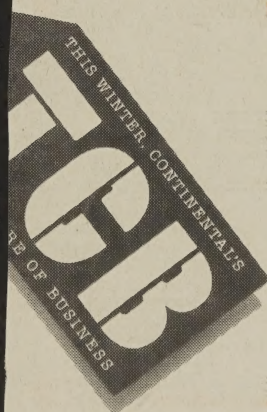
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